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Sen. Allen's legislation lifting ban on scholarships for religious studies signed into law

LANSING – Sen. Jason Allen, R-Traverse City, announced that five bills making college theology, divinity and religious education majors eligible for scholarships or grant money from the state of Michigan have been signed into law.

Allen led the effort on the multi-bill, bipartisan package last year to end the practice of discrimination against certain types of academic study. Several Senate bills were passed by the Legislature and have now been enacted into law as Public Acts 145, 180-184.

“We have leveled the playing field for college students across the state,” Allen said. “Scholarships provided by the state should be available to all Michigan college students, regardless of their academic pursuits. It was the right thing to do. Students in need of scholarships and financial assistance should not have their choice of studies limited.”

Teresa Becker, one of Allen's constituents, is a student who did not have equal access to the more than \$242 million awarded annually to students via grants and scholarships because she chose to study theology. Becker filed a lawsuit against the state earlier this year when they rescinded her scholarship based on her major; to date no decision on the case has been made.

Religious studies and theology students will now have equal access to the following five main scholarship and grant programs: The Legislative Merit Award, the Michigan Educational Opportunity Grant, the Michigan Competitive Scholarship, the Part-time Independent Student Grant and the state's Tuition Grant programs.

Allen said changing the law also will help the state avoid future potential lawsuits, such as the one filed by Becker.

“This is an issue of educational freedom, not of church and state,” Allen said. “Students who excel academically and have earned scholarships should be entitled to them, regardless of their major.”

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